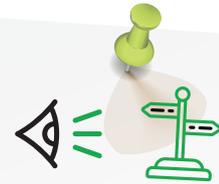


SIGNAGE

How can signs help a person living with dementia in a residential care home to find their way around?

Signs are everywhere, providing information and directions to help people find their way around – they are part of the concept known as ‘wayfinding’. In a residential care home a unique artwork, architectural feature or a sign can all be used to help residents with wayfinding. A sign should be considered as complementary and may not be necessary if other wayfinding measures or means of communication are already available. Any signs need to be designed consistently across the care home and the whole site. This benefits everyone.

If signage is used, it needs to be carefully designed and be available at key decision points such as a corridor crossroad or the closed door of a room. Too much signage or poorly located signage (e.g. on a noticeboard or in a front foyer) can make an area feel cluttered. This can be stressful for the resident and the staff trying to encourage the resident to find their own way.



In a residential care home a unique artwork, architectural feature or a sign can all be used to help residents with wayfinding.



What you can do now

To begin, consider whether a sign is actually required:

- Check how the use of signs relates to your organisation’s model of care (e.g. does a homelike model support the use of signs?).
- Introduce cues near the room approach (e.g. a painting of food on the dining room wall or a menu board).
- Use intuitive cues such as locating a (real) bookshelf outside the library.
- Provide visual prompts (e.g. an open shelf for displaying contents).
- Assess the resident’s individual requirements before adding signs within a bedroom.
- Consider whether a sign is needed to identify staff-only areas.

Ensure any signage in use is easy to see, read and understand:

- De-clutter areas such as noticeboards to attract attention to essential signs.
- Check the height of signs for reading up close and from a distance.

- Avoid signage on the floor – stickers can cause trips or be seen as a hole.
- Combine words and pictures or symbols (e.g. the word ‘Toilet’ alongside a pictogram of a toilet).
- Check that the wording is familiar (e.g. ‘Lounge’ instead of ‘Multipurpose room’).
- Contrast wording to stand out against the sign background and the wall.



What you can plan for the future

- Ensure safety signage complies with regulations and guidelines, reflecting appropriate luminance contrast.
- Create consistency in signage across the residential care home (e.g. toilet signage and door features).
- Use non-reflective signs.
- Avoid complicated signage with lots of rules, arrows or instructions.

Key Design Principles: Principle 4 Reduce unhelpful stimulation, Principle 5 Optimise helpful stimulation, Principle 6 Support movement and engagement.
<https://dta.com.au/resources/environmental-design-resources-introduction>

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Consult the DTA Environments team for advice and support in making your environment dementia friendly

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